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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, OREP (RYAN, LEO), GY

SUBJECT: THE JONESTOWN TRAGEDY

REF: STATE 295317

1. FOLLOWING FOR YOUR INFORMATION IS A SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS AND ISSUES RELATED TO THE JONESTOWN TRAGEDY.

2. ONE WEEK AFTER THE MURDER OF CONGRESSMAN LEO RYAN AND FOUR OTHERS, THE TRANSPORT TO THE UNITED STATES OF THE REMAINS OF OVER 900 US CITIZENS LED TO THEIR DEATHS BY PEOPLES TEMPLE LEADER JIM JONES HAS BEEN COMPLETED. THIS TRAGEDY OF MURDER AND MASS SUICIDE, UNFOLDING AGAINST A BACKDROP OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE OF PEOPLES TEMPLE MEMBERS BY JONES, HAS CAPTURED THE ATTENTION OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC FOR OVER A WEEK AND HAS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON MAJOR QUESTIONS OF THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS CULTS IN SOCIETY AND THE PROPER ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN DEALING WITH THE PHENOMENON, AT HOME AND ABROAD. THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT IN DEALING WITH THE PEOPLES TEMPLE COMMUNITY IN GUYANA HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MAJOR CENTERS OF ATTENTION.

3. THE GRUESOME TASK OF RETURNING THE REMAINS HAS NOW BEEN COMPLETED. OVER 350 MILITARY PERSONNEL AND OUR EMBASSY

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U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1978 — 255-273-71

STAFF WORKED LONG HOURS UNDER UNIMAGINABLY TRYING CONDITIONS. OUR HELICOPTER UNITS IN GUYANA FLEW A TOTAL OF 271 HOURS AND THERE WERE 60 FLIGHTS BY C-141 AND C-130 CARGO PLANES. THE GUYANESE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF OUR EFFORT BY FACILITATING OUR MOVEMENT IN AND OUT OF THE COUNTRY. THE GUYANESE, HOWEVER, HAVE CONSIDERED THE DISPOSITION OF THE REMAINS TO BE ESSENTIALLY AN AMERICAN PROBLEM; IDENTIFICATION AND DIGNIFIED BURIAL IN ISOLATED JONESTOWN WERE BEYOND GUYANA'S CAPABILITIES.

4. THE GUYANESE COOPERATED FULLY IN THE SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS IN THE ALMOST UNACCESSIBLE JUNGLE AROUND JONESTOWN. EVEN BEFORE THE US WAS ABLE TO DEPLOY HELICOPTERS TO SUPPORT THE SEARCH OPERATION, THE GOG HAD 300-400 MEN INVOLVED IN THE SEARCH THROUGH THE JUNGLE AND ALONG THE RIVER BANKS. INDIAN GUIDES FROM THE AREA WERE PARTICULARLY VALUABLE. ONCE US AIRLIFT WAS AVAILABLE VIRTUALLY EVERY SETTLEMENT IN NORTHWEST GUYANA WAS VISITED BY JOINT US GOG TEAMS TO SEEK SIGNS OF POTENTIAL SURVIVORS. ASIDE FROM A SMALL NUMBER WHO HID BRIEFLY IN THE NEARBY JUNGLE AND RETURNED EARLY IN THE WEEK SURVIVORS HAVE NOT BEEN FOUND; INDICATING THAT VERY FEW FLED INTO THE JUNGLE DURING THE MASS MURDER/SUICIDE.

5. THE GOG HAS, NEVERTHELESS, TAKEN A VERY DIRECT INTEREST IN POSSIBLE CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY AND IS DETAINING JONESTOWN SURVIVORS AS EITHER SUSPECTS OR MATERIAL WITNESSES. TWO PERSONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN CHARGED WITH MURDER AND WILL BE TRIED IN GUYANA. THE GOG HAS ALSO SEALED OFF THE SITE OF THE PEOPLES TEMPLE COMMUNITY PENDING DECISION ON ITS DISPOSITION. THE GUYANESE HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO PERMIT US TO PLAY A ROLE IN THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION IN GUYANA BUT WE ARE SEEKING TO COOPERATE WITH THEM IN THE EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE.

6. EIGHTY SURVIVORS OF THE JONESTOWN COLONY REMAIN IN GUYANA UNDER GOG CONTROL. THEY ARE DIVIDED INTO TWO FACTIONS: THOSE WHO ESCAPED DEATH IN THE MURDER/SUICIDE AND THOSE PEOPLES TEMPLE MEMBERS WHO HAPPENED TO BE IN GEORGETOWN DURING THE TRAGEDY AND WERE LATER DETAINED BY THE GOG. THE TWO GROUPS HOLD STRONG ANIMOSITY FOR ONE ANOTHER AND ARE BEING QUARTERED SEPARATELY. THE GOG HAS NOT YET DETERMINED WHEN THEY WILL BE PERMITTED TO LEAVE. WE ARE PREPARED TO RETURN THEM ALL TO THE US AS SOON AS THEY ARE RELEASED. ONLY ONE ELDERLY AND ILL JONESTOWN SURVIVOR HAS THUS FAR BEEN PERMITTED TO LEAVE GUYANA.

7. THE PROPORTIONS OF THE JONESTOWN TRAGEDY HAVE TRANSCENDED THE CAPACITY OF MOST AMERICANS TO UNDERSTAND. IT BECAME A MAJOR MEDIA EVENT - DOMINATING TV NEWS AND THE FRONT PAGES OF NEWSPAPERS FOR OVER A WEEK. THE LOCATION OF EVENTS IN AN ISOLATED AREA 120 MILES BY AIR FROM THE CAPITAL OF GEORGETOWN SURROUNDED BY JUNGLE CANOPY AND WITHOUT LAND ACCESS HAS ADDED TO THE MYSTERY AND INTEREST IN THE STORY. HOWEVER, THE EVENTS APPEAR TO HAVE GROWN OUT OF THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF A COMMUNITY WHICH WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY AMERICAN; THE GOG HAD LITTLE TO DO WITH THE COMMUNITY EXCEPT FOR ALLOWING IT TO ESTABLISH ITSELF IN A FRONTIER AREA. OF COURSE, AS GUYANA IS ITSELF A MULTI-RACIAL COMMUNITY WITH RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, A WIDE SPECTRUM OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND A GOVERNMENT POLICY OF ENCOURAGING SOCIALISM AND COOPERATIVES, THE PEOPLES TEMPLE FOUND THE GUYANA ATMOSPHERE MORE OPEN TO ITS IDEAS THAN MANY ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS. WHILE THE MAIN FOCUS IN THE US MEDIA HAS BEEN ON THE EVENTS THEMSELVES AND THE TASK OF RETURNING THE BODIES TO THE US, THE MEDIA HAS ALSO FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT IN DEALING WITH AMERICAN CITIZENS ABROAD.

8. ACCORDING TO SAN FRANCISCO POLICE THE ASSASSINATIONS OF MAYOR GEORGE MOSCONE AND CITY SUPERVISOR HARVEY MILK NOVEMBER 27 APPEAR TO BE UNRELATED TO THE EVENTS IN GUYANA. A DISGRUNTLED OFFICE SEEKER AND FORMER MEMBER OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS IS BEING HELD IN CONNECTION WITH THE SHOOTING. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS THAT THE PEOPLES TEMPLE HAD NAMED A "HIT SQUAD" TO ELIMINATE PROMINENT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE MAYOR, AND THE SHOOTING IS LIKELY TO CREATE ADDITIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STRAINS ON THOSE JONESTOWN SURVIVORS WHO HAVE EXPRESSED FEAR FOR THEIR PERSONAL SAFETY.

9. THE PRINCIPAL ISSUES THAT HAVE BEEN RAISED THUS FAR AND THAT ARE LIKELY TO RECEIVE FURTHER ATTENTION AND OUR RESPONSES ARE:

Q. COULD VIOLENCE HAVE BEEN AVERTED? WAS CONGRESSMAN RYAN GIVEN SUFFICIENT WARNING OF THE DANGER HE FACED? SHOULD HE HAVE BEEN GIVEN MORE PROTECTION DURING HIS VISIT TO JONESTOWN?

A. DEPARTMENT BRIEFED RYAN AND STAFF ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. RYAN HAD ALSO RECEIVED INFORMATION ON SITUATION FROM HIS OWN SOURCES. BECAUSE CONSULAR OFFICER HAD VISITED GEORGETOWN FOUR TIMES IN 1978 WITHOUT DIFFICULTY AND OTHERS ESPECIALLY CALIFORNIA OFFICIALS ALSO VISITED, WE WE HAD NO REASON TO BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE A MAJOR

VIOLENT REACTION. WE TOLD THE CODEL THAT THE PRESENCE OF PRESS AND CONCERNED FAMILY WITH THE CODEL COULD CREATE PROBLEMS. WE EMPHASIZED THAT THE CODEL COULD VISIT ONLY WITH THE PRIOR AUTHORIZATION OF THE PEOPLES TEMPLE.

Q. DID EMBASSY CONSULAR OFFICERS PURSUE AGGRESSIVELY ENOUGH QUESTIONS OF MISTREATMENT OF JONESTOWN INHABITANTS OR INVESTIGATE THOROUGHLY ALLEGATIONS THAT SOME WERE BEING HELD THERE AGAINST THEIR WILL?

A. DURING CONSULAR VISITS SOME 50 INTERVIEWS WERE HELD WITH INDIVIDUALS ALLEGEDLY BEING HELD AGAINST THEIR WILL. THESE MEETINGS WERE PRIVATE, OUT OF EARSHOT, IN OPEN FIELDS, AND IN ALL CASES INDIVIDUALS DENIED BEING MISTREATED OR FORCED TO REMAIN IN JONESTOWN. THE CONSULAR OFFICERS SAW NO EVIDENCE OF MISTREATMENT ON THEIR VISITS.

Q. WHAT IS THE USG'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS WHO JOIN UNORTHODOX CULTS AND TAKE UP RESIDENCE ABROAD?

A. THERE ARE LIMITS ON WHAT THE USG CAN DO - BY BILL OF RIGHTS REGARDING FREEDOM OF RELIGION, AND BY PRACTICAL RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY SCARCITY OF FUNDS AND PERSONNEL. NEVERTHELESS WE HAD DEVOTED A GREAT DEAL MORE TIME, EFFORT AND ATTENTION TO THIS GROUP THAN TO ALMOST ANY OTHER GROUP OF AMERICANS LIVING ABROAD.

Q. WHY WERE EARLY COUNTS OF BODIES IN JONESTOWN SO FAR SHORT OF THE APPARENT FINAL COUNT?

A. THE FIRST PRELIMINARY COUNT WAS PROVIDED TO US BY THE GOG. WHEN US MILITARY BEGAN TO PROCESS BODIES FOR RETURN TO THE US THEY FOUND BODIES LAYERED AT THE CENTER OF THE CAMP; LARGER BODIES COVERING CHILDREN.

Q. WHAT WAS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JONES AND THE GOG?

A. IT IS A FACT THAT THE GOG GAVE PERMISSION FOR JONES TO ESTABLISH HIS SETTLEMENT IN GUYANA AND THAT JONES WAS OFTEN SEEN WITH HIGH OFFICIALS OF THE GUYANESE GOVERNMENT.

Q. SHOULD THE USG HAVE PAID FOR THE RETURN OF THE REMAINS OF THE JONESTOWN INHABITANTS TO THE US?

A. GIVEN THE ENORMITY OF THE TASK, ISOLATION OF JONESTOWN, AND INABILITY OF GOG TO IDENTIFY DEAD AND PROVIDE ADEQUATE BURIAL IT WAS DECIDED TO HAVE US MILITARY TRANSPORT BODIES BACK TO THE US.

ADDITIONALLY, GOG HAD REQUESTED US TO REMOVE THE BODIES FROM GUYANA.

10. MANY OF THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE TREATED MORE FULLY IN THE DEPARTMENT'S REPLY TO AN INQUIRY FROM THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE ASKING FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE ROLE OF US OFFICIALS IN DEALING WITH THE PEOPLES TEMPLE SINCE IT ESTABLISHED ITS COLONY IN GUYANA AND FOR OUR VIEWS ON ITS RELATIONS WITH THE GOG. 44